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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKISH ORTHODOXY: ONE PATRIARCH, THREE CHURCHES,
TWENTY PEOPLE

Classified By: Consul General David L. Arnett for reason 1.4 (d).

1. (C) Summary: It's hard to be a patriarch with a tiny domain. Recently-enthroned Turkish Orthodox Patriarch Pasa Umit Erenerol is the third Patriarch of a "church" that dates its founding back to 1922 and the heat of a civil war. Today, the patriarch's writ goes no further than his extended family, though the fact of his patriarchal status allows the family to hold on to three church buildings claimed by the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Ultra-nationalist elements of the Turkish establishment continue to see the microscopic church as a foil to its Ecumenical rival. End Summary.

A Short History of Turkish Orthodoxy

2. (U) In 1922, Turkey and Greece were in the midst of a pitched battle for national survival, fighting town-to-town through western Anatolia amidst an ethnically-mixed population. In Kayseri, an ethnic Greek, Pavli (later "Papa" or Pope) Eftim, gathered 72 priests and other Orthodox followers to the banner of Mustafa Kemal's Turkish Nationalists and rejected the leadership of the Ecumenical Patriarch. In 1924, Papa Eftim and some of his followers occupied the Ecumenical Patriarchate at Fener for a time. Later that year, Fener was returned to the Ecumenical Patriarch, reportedly at the request of the Turkish government. Still, three churches (all in the Beyoglu district of Istanbul) were awarded to Papa Eftim, and he was installed as Patriarch of a new Turkish Orthodox Church.

Master of His Domain

3. (U) Eftim's community, once numbering in the thousands, gradually dropped away through a combination of old age and immigration to Europe and elsewhere. He and his American wife had a son, Selcuk Erenerol, who took over the Patriarchate after his death. Pasa Umit Erenerol was named Patriarch after Selcuk Erenerol's death earlier this year. According to Sevgi Erenerol, his sister, the Patriarch leads approximately 20 people who attend one of three churches (Panayia Church, the Patriarchal seat), as the other two are badly burned and in need of renovation, respectively. According to Sevgi Erenerol, the 20 people are members of three families.

4. (U) The current patriarch has no formal religious training, though he was "raised in church," according to Sevgi Erenerol. The Turkish Orthodox Patriarchate has no regular contact with any other national Orthodox Church, by their own admission. There are no other ordained clergy in the church. The church has no foundations or property other than the three church buildings. However, the economic situation of the Turkish Orthodox Patriarchate is good, "thanks to the support of the state," according to Erenerol.

A Foil to Fener

5. (C) The Patriarchal offices are covered with evidence of Turkish nationalist sentiment. Photos, busts, and sayings of Ataturk are everywhere. A map of Central Asia hangs over the door, with the faces of Ataturk, Mehmet the Conqueror, and Genghis Khan superimposed. The nationalist pedigree of the church is impeccable; at the enthronement ceremony for the current Patriarch, MHP representatives sat next to the Mufti for the Muslim minority in Greek Thrace, "TRNC" representatives, and spouses of people killed by the PKK. Property issues aside, ultra-nationalist elements of the establishment continue to see the church as a useful foil to the ambitions of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and more generally Greece.

Comment

16. (C) The Turkish Orthodox Church, a microscopic community within the already-small Orthodox minority in Turkey, gains mention only by virtue of competing property claims with the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Selcuk Erenerol was, before his death, famous for his invective against the Ecumenical Patriarch and "foreign interests" in Turkey. To date, Pasa Umit Erenerol has not made any major public statements. It remains to be seen if ultra-nationalists will continue to find use for the diminutive church in the future.

ARNETT